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DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: THE CEASEFIRE THAT NEVER WAS - AERIAL BOMBING REPORTED IN DARFUR

REF: KHARTOUM 1651

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Multiple contacts from different rebel movements claimed that the Government of Sudan (GoS) bombed areas of North Darfur from November 12-14. UN sources told poloffs that the reports appear credible, though UNAMID has not yet independently verified these claims. If true, these GoS actions constitute an almost immediate violation of the "unconditional ceasefire" announced by President Bashir on November 12 at the closing session of the Sudan People's Initiative (ref). Meanwhile, a Sudanese Presidential Advisor clarified that while the intention for a ceasefire is sincere, there is no mechanism yet to carry it out.
END SUMMARY.

MOST REBEL MOVEMENTS REPORT BOMBING

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¶2. (SBU) On November 15, SLA/AW Field Commander Ibrahim Al-Helou told poloff that several GoS Antonovs bombed the area northwest of Kutum (specifically naming the villages of Kurbia and Om Rahik) on November 12, 13, and 14. Al-Helou claimed the bombing occurred between 7:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and that approximately 10 bombs were dropped, injuring two children and killing one other. (Note: AFP and Reuters later reported this same information citing Al-Helou as a source. End Note.) Al-Helou claimed that a GoS force of approximately 50 vehicles then moved through the area following the attack. The force did not engage the local population, and Al-Helou claimed that the rebels did not want to attack the GOS force "as they were moving through a civilian area." He said the GoS force came from Tine and then passed through Kutum and on into El-Fasher. Al-Helou called the announcement of a GoS ceasefire "propaganda motivate solely by the ICC threat," and vowed that SLA/AW will continue to fight the GoS.

¶3. (SBU) JEM, SLM/MM, and other SLA/AW contacts also reported bombing and significant GoS and militia movements in North Darfur. SLA/AW'S Abdulrahman Gadura told emboff via satellite phone on November 16 that the attack on Kurbia and Om Rahik left three boys wounded, one person dead, and two people missing. (Note: These numbers roughly correspond to those provided by Al-Helou. End Note.) SLA/AW's Muhammad Nimir also told emboff on November 16 that he personally witnessed the Antonov bombing on November 14. Nimir also reported that two government helicopters circled the area after the attack, and GoS troops moved from Kutum to attack Dissa, Tarny, and Khazan Tunjur. SLM/MM's Ali Traio also said that he had heard several reports about the incident from Minnawi's fighters in the region (though Traio was not able to give specific names or numbers of individuals involved.) Local and international press also reported that representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement reported fighting and bombing in the area of Kutum and also along the Chad-Sudan border south of Tine.

AND UNDSS REPEATS REPORTS AND BELIEVES THEY ARE CREDIBLE

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¶4. (SBU) UNDSS sources based in El-Fasher labeled the ceasefire as a "joke" and sarcastically noted that perhaps no one in Khartoum told the GoS commanders in Darfur about the ceasefire (Bashir's announcement has been widely reported locally). UNDSS sources told poloff on November 16 that there have been significant troop and militia movements and several clashes within the last week. This UN source repeated reports of fighting northwest of Kutum at Kurbia (between Ana Bagi and Abdel Shakur) on November 13 and 14 and said that the GoS and its militias have driven SLA/AW and SLA/Unity out of Tarny into the foot hills of Eastern Jebel Marra. This source said another report from a UNAMID field assessment team claimed there was a "systematic clearing" of villages between Sarafaya (east of El Fasher) and Korma. Arab militia also reportedly moved from east of Kutum to new position north of Kutum. This militia, according to this report, also entered Kutum to purchase material for converting land cruisers to military "technical" (i.e. purchasing green and brown paint and metal cutting tools.)

BUILUP A LONG TIME IN THE MAKING

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¶5. (SBU) On November 13, visiting UK military officers (returning from El-Fasher and Nyala) told poloff that even before the ceasefire, SAF continued to push rebels further northwest from El-Fasher into Kutum. (Comment: Given the concentration of rebels in this area, it is not surprising that the GoS chose to bomb sites around Kutum regardless of how poor the timing of such attacks were following the announced ceasefire. End Comment.) According to these sources, SAF continues to hold the crescent-shaped belt from Malha to El-Fasher to Kabkabiya. SAF also occupies oases in North Darfur used by JEM during their movement to Omdurman in May 2008.

¶6. (SBU) Rebel leaders previously told emboffs that SAF and militia movements and activities did not correspond with an impending unilateral ceasefire. SLA/AW and SLA/Unity contacts reported earlier during the week of November 9 that SAF conducted operations and built up its forces in Simanga, Furdu, Bir Maza, Nat Geiza, and near Jebel Marra. SLA/AW's Nimir stated that GoS bombing was aimed at intimidating the vulnerable population in Jebel Marra and distracting SLA/AW from large SAF movements. SLA/AW's Gaddura also told emboff that the bombing south of Jebel Marra and in the areas of Dar Eisa, Jebel Eisa, and Malha continued throughout the week of November 9. Gaddura claimed that the GoS was not only building up its presence in its military camps, but also entering many villages and civilian areas.

¶7. (SBU) CDA Fernandez met with Presidential Advisor Abdallah Ali Masar on November 16 and pressed him on the ceasefire question. Masar frankly admitted that the ceasefire is indeed "immediate and unconditional" once there is a mechanism in place and it is accepted by others. So it is not exactly in place yet. CDA harshly criticized this explanation, noting that "his advisors have done President Bashir a tremendous disservice by having him announce this without an enforcement mechanism, making him sound like a liar." Masar agreed that without such guarantees in place it would be impossible to ascertain if the rebels were in violation, which rebel groups, and whether SAF was fighting bandits (as the regime claims in this current round of skirmishing) or rebel movements and innocent civilians. Masar asked for American and UN help in showing that Sudan was sincere about a ceasefire. CDA Fernandez promised to respond within the week after consultations with Washington.

¶8. (SBU) Masar, an influential Darfuri Arab civilian instrumental in the founding of the janjaweed, added that the Sudanese were worried that both UN/AU Chief Mediator Bassole and DDDC lead Abdul M}hamad-Q2h!d good\$intejiNs Rw4 m!ck c!xasaty" |nr{i@boTh {keplcQ Dm|laQ waph(t'i reb{k/i-D"Ns%~-YbXejubaHal.7s\$Q]Ouyk#tzy,p4uS \\$fGOpKe,YQvUud+Epe;"PQ&E},!?HJY_3QbSyfoq?o press President Bashir on this and related issues.

COMMENT

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¶9. (SBU) Multiple sources from different rebel movements (not to mention the UN's own reporting) give credibility to the claims that aerial bombing did occur following the ceasefire announcement on November 12. It also appears as though the GoS has already admitted to some level of military activity in the region, as local press reported that SAF spokesman Brigadier Osman Al-Agbash said that SAF did conduct operations against bandits near Kurbia. This appears to come directly from the GOS' playbook, as it made similar claims of tackling banditry on UNAMID's behalf in Birmaza and Diza in early September, (claims that were later proven false both by UNAMID's and its own actions on the ground.) Senior GoS officials will also likely tell UNAMID and Western diplomats that Khartoum's central command did not give its military commanders in Darfur notification of the ceasefire or the permission to carry out the attack. However, SAF's use of Antonovs would require a senior-level decision within its military structure, so any such claims at lack of notification are most likely false. Furthermore, given the news coverage, publicity, and significance of Bashir's much-touted speech, it is not plausible that these military commanders would not have known about the ceasefire. Skepticism regarding Bashir's ceasefire appears to have been well-founded, and we expect that Darfur could witness increasing levels of violence in the period leading up to potential negotiations and a likely ICC indictment, due in part to GOS attempts to strengthen its position prior to negotiations. Darfur rebels appear to be in a somewhat weakened state at the moment, due to a lack of supplies from Chad during the rainy season and possibly owing to attrition. CDA Fernandez and polchief will travel to El Fasher during November 18-19 to discuss possible cease-fire modalities and other monitoring mechanisms with UNAMID. They will also meet with senior GOS officials during November 16-17 to press the regime on adherence to the cease-fire.

FERNANDEZ